

Hospital Overcrowding & Diversion Meeting Minutes
Arizona State Public Health Laboratory Auditorium
250 North 17th Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona
March 10, 2006

I. CALL TO ORDER

Susan Gerard, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Director, called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m.

II. DIRECTOR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Director welcomed and thanked all the participants for attending the meeting. The Director stated that she called the meeting to call attention to recent issues that have developed related to hospital overcrowding and to discuss the Department's initiative to develop and implement strategies to improve and maximize the efficiency of emergency care in Arizona.

The Director invited the meeting participants to collaborate and develop specific strategies to improve emergency care efficiency with a goal of maximizing patient care by participating in one of the several working groups that the Department will be forming including working groups in:

- Exceeding Licensed Capacity
- Diversion
- Use of Emergency Medical Technicians ("EMTs") in Hospital Settings
- Role of Regional Councils in Systems Development

The Director stated that the Department would have a web link on the department home page at: www.azdhs.gov on Wednesday, March 15, 2006 that will guide the meeting participants to a web-based volunteer registration site. The Director informed the participants that meeting minutes would be posted on the Department's web site.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The Director stated that key representatives of the following groups were invited to the meeting:

- Health Care Facilities
- Health Care Providers
- City/Town Fire Departments/Districts
- Ambulance Providers
- City Management
- Consumers
- Emergency Medical Services Regional Councils
- ADHS Preparedness and Response
- ADHS Licensing
- ADHS Emergency Medical Services

IV. ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

The Director again stated that the primary objective of the meeting is to create interdisciplinary work groups that will develop strategies to improve and maximize the efficiency of emergency care in Arizona.

The Director then asked each participant to give his/her name, who they work for and what they consider to be a primary issue that should be addressed in order to improve emergency care in Arizona. The issues that were put forth from the participants were:

- Regional approach to problem
- Flexibility to call diversion as needed
- System approach to diversion
- Specialty hospitals willing to help
- Centralized dispatch
- Patient choice
- Good data on growth to address future issues
- Concern about patient outcomes due to overcapacity
- Inability to take care of patients who walk-in
- Disaster plans/overcapacity definitions
- Diversion impact on pre-hospital resources
- Specialty hospital impact on system
- How does EMS get paramedics back into rotation
- Disaster plan definition - when to call
- Identify statewide issues, i.e., diversion to Casa Grande
- Trying to comply with regulations without enough resources
- Specialty hospitals also experiencing overcapacity
- Tribal EMS wants to be involved and understand how they can help and Participate
- Overcrowding/nursing shortage
- Remember patient needs
- Standardized definition - need to have systemic approach to diversion
- Fire departments want to participate in solutions
- Educating the public on how to use emergency departments/EMS appropriately
- Regulatory flexibility to meet health and safety demands
- State statute that governs intensive care unit ("ICU") ratio
- Collaborative effort
- All levels involved in decision making
- Central medical control with qualified people making decisions on regional basis
- Improvement in diversion rules
- Bomb threats, pandemics
- Turnaround time to accept patients and get the ambulance back on the street
- Shortage of nurses

- EMS and hospitals need to communicate better
- Diversion and rotation
- Collaboration and cooperation between all involved
- Growth of population - stats
- Flexibility without penalty
- Better communication between fire departments and hospitals
- Specialty population of pediatrics and identify how a free standing pediatrics Hospital links into the system
- Each hospital capacity as far as staffing, patient acuity and capacity
- Better EMS tracking system
- Bring everyone to the table
- Fire wants deployment intact
- Hospital gridlock
- Make sure patient care and safety is foremost

V. DISCUSSION OF NEXT STEPS

The Director stated that she was glad to see that the participants' issues were similar to issues identified by the Department. The Director again invited the participants to volunteer for the workgroups on these subjects.

Will Humble, the ADHS Deputy Assistant Director for Public Health Preparedness discussed the details of the web-based volunteer website and asked participants to ensure that they completely fill out the registration form with their name, organization, phone number, and a required field requesting your E-mail address.

The Director then invited participants to ask questions:

Question from a participant: Can ADHS put the technical advice on the Website so the hospitals could refer to it?

Response from the Director: That would probably not work because each situation has its own solution and we do not know all those solutions yet so we would not be able to put them on the Website. Mary Wiley, ADHS Assistant Director of Licensing Services confirmed the response with further explanation.

Question from a participant: Are we still allowed to implement the centralized diversion pilot project in the Southeast Sector of the Central Region? What happens in the East Valley as far as diversion is concerned?

Response from the Director: The Department stated that the Arizona Emergency Medical Services (AEMS) "Red Book" states that the official position of AEMS is to implement a diversion policy in the SE Sector that includes provisions for diversion. She stated that she could find nothing in that official policy (Chapter 8) that discusses a ban on diversion or on hospital closure. She stated that the

Department's understanding is that the Sectors in the Central Region should be following the provisions in the AEMS Red Book.

The Director thanked the participants and stated that the Department's employees would be contacting those that volunteer for the working groups shortly.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.